

McGill Daily Culture

volume 86 • number 43

January 23 — 29, 1997

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- THE LURID LARRY FLINT

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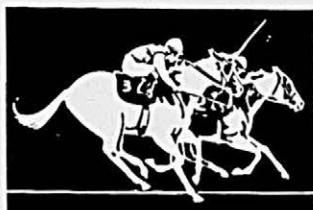
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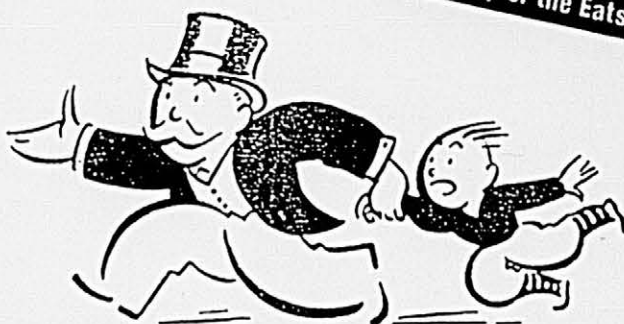
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EVENTS

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- The McGill Film and Video Festival general meeting, 3475 Peel. from 18h to 19h.

Friday,
January 24

- Tom LeGrand lecture: Université de Montréal's Department of Demography, 12h30.

- FLUX magazine benefit party at the Cabaret (2111 St. Laurent) featuring Dominatrix and Drag show. Admission \$5, 22h.

- Lori Bell: Médecins Sans Frontières lecture: "Sentinel site food security and nutritional surveillance in Mozambique" Purvis Hall, 1020 Pins, room 24. 8h30.

Monday,
January 27

- McGill Women's Union (Shatner 423) meeting for women interested in volunteering, 16h30. Info: 398-6823.

Tuesday,
January 28

- The Montreal Chest Institute's Smoking Cessation Program Tuesdays, 18h-20h. Register 849-5201, ext. 2503.

Wednesday,
January 29

- Dr. Norma Joseph, Department of Religion, Concordia University leads a text study on Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's work on the education of Jewish women. Shatner B-09/10, 12h30. Info: 845-9171.

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The Little Shop of Horrors

A better killer plant

by Noémi Tousignant



PERFORMANCE

Little Shop of Horrors is a terrifying kind of play. Not so much for its audience, but rather for its director and cast who have the delicate job of avoiding any of the excesses which come so naturally with musicals. The musical theatre style, whether it be tragic or comic, always seems to be a parody of itself. It all ready lacks the dignity of theatre and the intensity of opera, but taking itself too seriously would

be its worst fate.

Director Kevin Clement and his company have cleverly escaped crumbling into banality and sappiness, while managing to conserve a touch of these essential elements in the appropriate places. The subtle yet striking alterations made by Clement to the original script are mostly responsible for making *Little Shop* a witty, eye-catching and seductive production.

The play opens with the three witches of

Macbeth who set the scene for bloodstained souls and weighty moral dilemmas. They then fling their capes aside and burst into shoo-op song; leading the action into a precise and layered, yet fairly standard "musical" style. Just as banality begins to set in, a lusty cry for blood slices through the room as the carnivorous plant emerges from her leaves. I was surprised that this role had apparently never been assigned to a female in former productions.

This alteration, along with the *Macbeth* twist, add a whole new shine to the evil side of the play's morality. The lust for fame, fortune and sex which pervades the story is given a glamorous sheen, which enables the creation of some brilliant contrasts between 'good' and 'evil' and magnifies the pull-and-tug in the moral dilemmas. While the female figures hold the power of desire in their hands, the men are portrayed as bumbling idiots hypnotized by temptation or as comically inept, clownish figures.

The female characters were especially well cast. The shoo-op girls (Penny Charbonneau,

Jennifer Finestone and Tamar Tembeck) are sassy and limber, and their strong voices add spunk to the requisite mob-chorus scenes. The deep full voice of the plant (Olivia Saragosa) was appropriate for the powerful role of the seductress, and was set in contrast with the prissy and undemanding air of Audrey (Ellen McKinney), who plays the innocent side of seduction. The quality of the instrumental accompaniment and of the choreography allowed it to run smoothly, even over the slower and sappier bits.

Some other small alterations, such as a few local references, were thrown in to make the play more at home on its stage. They were clever but not really necessary to make the audience identify with the themes of the play.

Little Shop was neither painfully long nor loud, not unnecessarily sappy and only fleetingly moralizing. While far from transcending the attributes of a musical, it was as subtle and dignified as this style will allow.

Little Shop of Horrors continues at Player's Theatre January 23-25 at 8 pm. Tickets are \$12, \$8 for students.

by Jameela Jeeroburkhan

Meet William

Planting English gardens in the Montréal cold

MUSIC

Sometimes you need a break. A break from pseudo-punk pubescent performances. A break from the same bands and the same sounds monopolizing the city's musical landscape. Or perhaps you weren't aware Montréal had a music scene to begin with.

Meet William.

This Montréal trio — guitarist and lead vocalist Sam Galaxy, bassist Tex and Ivan on drums — is a merging of sounds, style and skill. And smiles, too. Talking to William, like seeing the band perform, is very entertaining.

"We're a total mix of all the stuff we like," explains Galaxy.

That "mix" has a definite British accent: the Beatles, early Stones (Brian Jones-era), the Kinks, as well as more recent bands like the Smiths (no, they claim the name does not come from the song), the Charlatans UK and the Stone Roses.

But how can one say 'Britpop' without evoking misleading Oasis comparisons?

"It's a wide kind of margin, but the name is pinpointing" says Ivan in reference to the Britpop label. "We're not British, we're Canadian. Sloan is Canadian, but you wouldn't call them Britpop, although they do have a certain (similar) sound. If they were in England, they'd be huge."

Galaxy explains the members have very little in common with British pop-rock bands, except elements of the sound.

"We're not from lower-middle class backgrounds, we're not from Manchester. We're all from Montréal. I prefer to call us 'Colonial pop'," he says with a grin.

"We're soul," retorts Ivan. Tex laughs. Ivan turns to him anxiously and says, "Well, there's an R&B influence in the Charlatans (UK)."

Tex agrees. "Of course, that's where rock 'n' roll comes from."

There is definitely something about William's music that recalls the meeting of Motown R&B and Liverpoolian rock 'n' roll. Songs are contagious, composition is rigorous and playing is very tight.

Although William are only less than a year old, the

band's live performances do not sound like practice sessions. They are experienced — for the most part — as Galaxy and Ivan have played together since their days at Loyola High School, including six years with the now defunct Grover.

Having grown up in this city, William have a slightly cynical sense of the 'Montréal music scene'.

"It would be fun to feel like there was a supportive environment," says Tex. But this isn't what the band has found.

"It's all up to word-of-mouth," remarks Ivan. "People just go to see their friends. It's great when there are faces in the crowd that we've never seen before."

Galaxy continues, "It's not the same in Halifax or Toronto; people (there) actually go out to see bands."

"It's so strange," comments Ivan, "but if you're from Montréal and you play Montréal, it's very hard to get known."

Is it a question of being an English-speaking band in Montréal?

"We played a show in Cowansville where the [French-speaking] crowd was very supportive," Ivan says in response. "They just wanted to see a live band."

"There are a lot of great bands in Montréal," affirms Galaxy, pointing to the Deers, Marlowe and Rev 32 as examples, "but there's nothing to cultivate them."

Ivan smiles at the farming analogy about to flow from his lips: "Just because you get a bunch of seeds, doesn't mean you're going to have a good crop. You have to work on it."



DAILY PHOTO BY LORI BRAUN

William feel that the Montréal media generally does not help in this initial cultivation, but instead often promotes people who already enjoy a degree of success. The Montréal ska scene, for example, had already established a fairly large following before it was 'announced' in the Gazette and the Mirror. William do not see a lot being done to discover what is out there, what is unknown.

Nonetheless, William do not imagine themselves moving to Toronto any time soon.

Instead, the band will be playing a series of shows in the upcoming week, including one at Concordia's Reggie's on Saturday.

Besides performing, the band is also busy working on a demo CD, entitled "Albatross," which they plan to send to radio stations and various record labels, including the Charlatans UK's Beggars Banquet Records. The band is not low on aspirations.

"I'd like to make it onto *Rita [and Friends]*," muses Tex dreamily. "They have that huge sing-along at the end."

Ivan explodes with laughter and Tex looks indignant, trying to convince his fellow band member of the opportunities Rita McNeil has to offer.

Meanwhile, Galaxy sums up the bands plans with a smile, "We're planning a tour of Eastern Europe. But until then, we'll continue our constant tour of Montréal."

William play tonight, January 23, at Clydes in Pointe-Claire; January 25 at Reggie's in Concordia; January 30 at Café Chaos on St-Denis; and February 1 in Toronto.

Forman flies into the

The People vs. Larry Flint: Not a new \$en\$ation

by Julien Lapointe

An early word of praise for *The People vs. Larry Flynt* in Film Comment declared, "[the film] succeeds for the most part as a boisterous, entertaining, skillfully commercial Hollywood film with artistic edges." That sounds less optimistic than it should. In the months preceding the release of *The People vs. Larry Flynt* (January 10 in Montréal), the critical consensus of rave reviews dressed up the picture as an audacious, revealing, albeit entertaining, examination of an era of American history. Janet Maslin in the New York Times wrote of its "crusading intelligence." David Ansen in Newsweek found it "a brave, spectacularly entertaining and unexpectedly stirring." The sequences dealing with Flynt's legal battles for the right to 'express himself' (relying on the first amendment for his defence) were treated with enthusiasm one would normally deem fit only for art. But then again, *Larry Flynt* has been merchandised as a work of serious art. The director, Milos Forman, has always been a perceptive observer of the social order which binds highly individualistic human beings (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Ragtime*, *Valmont*). However, his resolutely impersonal style has already led him to direct shallow commercial works, often devoid of any intelligence (*Hair*, *Amadeus*). *The People vs. Larry Flynt* is crass popular film-making: superficially enjoyable and amusing, but also undeniably offensive and irresponsible towards any political issues it supposedly raises.

This is the type of prestige picture Hollywood releases at the year's end to influence the voting decisions for the Academy Awards in their favour, and possibly to boost the film's box office performance, as it is still in release when the Oscars come around. Pictures such as *Schindler's List*, *In the Name of the Father*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Nixon* were all labeled with the stamp of Art for the sake of commercial success. The so-called audacity or honesty that many of them purport is illusory, even fraudulent. Conventional, superficial, melodramatic and pretentious, they are the products of Hollywood's programmatic film-making. Their subject matter suggests Big Ideas, but within the film itself, there is hardly ever a single idea.

The People vs. Larry Flynt has all the unfortunate characteristics cited above, and is offensive to boot. Granted, the directing is well-executed, as Forman does his usual good job of staging the action at a quick pace. The scenario itself, devised by Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski (*Ed Wood*), is funny, occasionally witty, and full of snappy dialogue. But

the film's frivolity detracts attention from its more objectionable viewpoints. Worse still, it adopts the hypocritical stance of championing the rights of free expression, when this film's mentality is clearly a reactionary one.

A real American hero

As envisioned by the scenarists, Larry Flynt is a brash, naïve, earnest (in an early scene, he declares, "I'm just trying to make an honest buck") pornographer who sincerely went about his business of marketing women's bodies with the intention of 'exalting' female sexuality. Hustler (which emerged during the '70s) is a more "honest" version of Playboy. Whereas the latter's eroticism is of a toned down nature, unexplicit and very safe, Flynt's pornography revels in the most outrageous extremes, because supposedly this is what sex is really all about. Larry Flynt is out to print the truth. Alexander and Karaszewski could have been a little more truthful themselves by exposing the more objectionable projects Flynt undertook.

As Gloria Steinem writes in a perceptive analysis, "Filmgoers do not see such Hustler features as *Dirty Pool*, which in January 1983 depicted a woman being gang-raped on a pool table. [...] You won't meet Chester the Molester the famous Hustler cartoon character who sexually stalks girls. [...] You certainly don't see such Hustler illustrations as a charred expanse of what looks like human skin, with photos of dead and dismembered women pinned to it."

What we do see in *Larry Flynt* are the much less degrading images: for example, a woman bearing her vulva, something common to Playboy at that time. The cartoons themselves are hardly provocative: the characters of *The Wizard of Oz* engaging in an orgy, Santa Clause bearing an erection for his wife and asking, "Is this your Ho-Ho-Ho?" Much of the film's spirit is equal to those cartoons — playful, promiscuous, funny and a little silly. The courtroom episodes are no exception. They have a bravura appeal to them; we're incited to cheer, not to think.

But this joyful portrait has been crafted with the intention of winning over our sympathies for the glamourized protagonist. There's nothing antipathetic about this Larry Flynt; as played by Woody Harrelson he's funny and charismatic. Even at the end, wheelchair-bound (after being shot by a sniper) and fat, he conserves an eccentric appeal. Harrelson overacts, howling throughout the scenes, but his performance serves only to keep Flynt likable. Larry Flynt is perverse in the same way the protagonists of most gangster films are perverse. As with the movie hero in *Scarface*, Flynt is a wretched fellow whose energy nevertheless makes him exciting and

enjoyable. The movie keeps us at a safe distance from Flynt's questionable character through the use of caricature. The farfetched, lewd tone eschews any of the more significant issues.

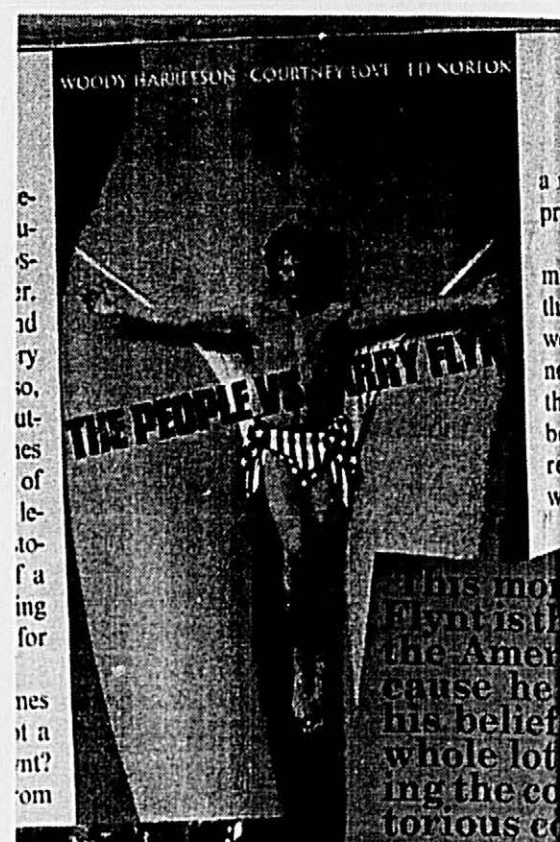
The People vs. Larry Flynt vs. The People

The dramatic intent of this gross spectacle may strike some as a little dubious: *The People vs. Larry Flynt* is a glorification of obscenity. Larry Flynt and his pals are the only enjoyable people in the picture, whereas the prosecutors are all stern, rigidly puritanical hypocrites. At an anti-pornography meeting, the members are shown to be abnormally interested in the distributed copies of Hustler; even their attack against Flynt is a fraud, since they obviously don't believe in the morality they advocate. Charles Keating, one of Flynt's primary enemies, is revealed to be a tax swindler. That may be a fact, but there is no reason to stigmatize the whole of anti-pornography on the basis of one bad member. The film doesn't deal honestly with the issues of free speech, because its own views willfully misrepresent those who were opposed to Flynt. In the ongoing conflict of *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, the "People" do not receive a fair trial.

The film's parading dishonesty is insulting. One episode has Flynt organizing an anti-censorship rally in which he argues that his pictures of nude women are less obscene than those taken every year of violence. He projects on a screen pictures from Hustler and depictions of violence (Hiroshima, the Nazis, My Lai), delivering a largely propagandistic speech and questioning, "What is more obscene? Sex or war?" The film would have us believe that this is a substantial argument (but isn't violence photographed for the sake of exposing its obscenity, whereas Flynt celebrates the obscenity of his special brand of pornography?). As Steinem pointed out, the real Flynt often inserted elements of strong violence into his own work. There is nothing wrong about the scene itself, but the whole tone suggests Flynt as being honest in his speech, which is woefully inappropriate.

An honest buck

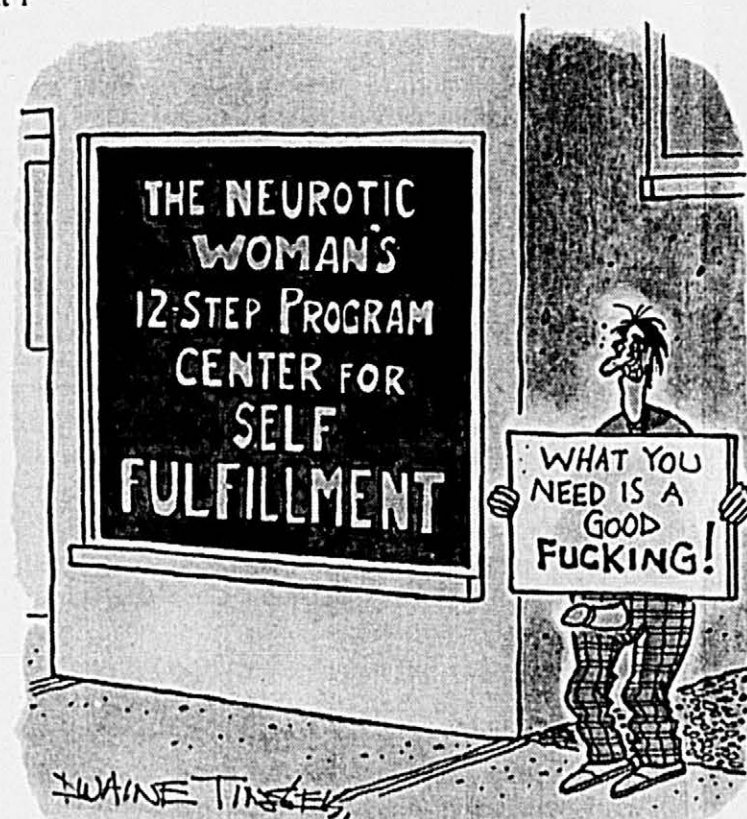
This film isn't really about freedom of expression, or even America's level of tolerance towards pornography. The whole dramatic conceit that Larry



The po the hypocrys

by Melanie Fearon

The magazine is Hustler, the movie is *The People vs. Larry Flynt*. The connection between these two examples of popular entertainment is the resulting media frenzy over a movie that takes as its subject matter Hustler magazine publisher and self-professed scumbag Larry



A CARTOON FROM THE BEST OF HUSTLER MAGAZINE, VOLUME 31

the Cuckoo's Nest

Flynt is sincere in his 'art' is based on the old American myth of the talented individual succeeding through perseverance and good will. This morally righteous Flynt is the archetype of the American hero, because he stands up for his beliefs and makes a whole lot of money during the course of his victorious conquest. Nothing veils Flynt's manipulation the law in order to have the right to publish Hustler. Nor is there the faintest suggestion that Hustler grew out of one more man's single-minded determination to exploit the appeal of sex in order to make an honest buck. The film shies away from the possibility that Larry Flynt was motivated more by money than any of his 'beliefs' in sex. Or that those 'beliefs' were those of a profoundly deranged man.

Almost everything in this picture is guided by an uninhibited interest in sensationalism. Milos Forman, by tem-

perament a tasteful director, doesn't exploit the various sex and sex-related scenes for mere shock effect. But the energetic rhythm with which he has organized his work has the result of reducing all the material to schlock entertainment. The script itself hardly lets a scene develop: the tightly written episodes roll by with only a minimal concern for dramatic continuity. When Larry Flynt is paralyzed there is not a moment's consideration for how the event affects him (except for the fact that he becomes an Atheist). He spends five years secluded in his mansion, taking drugs. We're shown plenty of degradation, but there isn't any torment related to Flynt's troubles. The whole point of this film is to keep the story moving, and its rapid motion leaves behind anything which a sophisticated viewer might call "drama." The exhilaration exists for its own sake.

Larry's gal

It may be a little pointless to try and determine what's most offensive in a picture like

The People vs. Larry Flynt, though I hazard its misogynistic characterization of Althea Leasure, Flynt's Hustler-girl/wife, takes the prize. Courtney Love, playing Althea, brings suitable charisma to the performance, though she can't escape the fact that the scenarists have conceived Althea as a simple object for Flynt's lust. As presented by the scenarists, Althea appears independent-minded and liberated in her sexuality; her independence consisting of making herself a star poser for Hustler. There's no doubt over the fact that the film's Althea is a heroine by Flynt's standards.

Her devotion to Larry, which incidentally leads to her ruin, is meant to epitomize her virtue as a loyal wife. So the principal female character in this picture is of the whore-with-a-heart-of-gold variation: she's good for sex and standing by her man. And that's all she's really about. (When she dies, we don't feel any pain for the pathos of the character, we're only meant to relate to Larry's grief at having lost his "gal").

What's finally disturbing about this picture

isn't that it was made, but that it has been canonized by much of the mainstream press. Considering that much of the tone of *The People vs. Larry Flynt* is one of entertainment, one can always argue that this picture shouldn't be taken so seriously. True enough, this film is undeserving of the attention it is receiving. And regretfully, I must concede, even to attack this "event" film is to fall into the trap of its publicity campaign. As Oliver Stone (the producer) very well knows, the most strident polemics are the best advertising when a picture has been engineered to become a *succès à scandale*.

morally righteous
the archetype of
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ing the course of his vic-
torious conquest.

politics of Hustler

hypocrisies of the magazine and the movie

Flynt. Now the mainstream movie coverage in North America would have movie-goers believe that although pornography in itself may be morally reprehensible to upstanding middle-class sentiments, Larry Flynt took on the U.S. court system in such a way that defends every U.S. citizen's right to freedom of expression.

My problems with the film have to do with its embedded hypocrisies; Hustler magazine was the first soft-core pornographic magazine to, purposefully or not, question class-based notions of sexuality and the body, while the film offers a glamorized narrative of a heroic crusader for free speech, Larry Flynt. If Hustler was born as a response to romanticized sexual imagery, *The People vs. Larry Flynt* is a strategically sentimental account of a man who unrepentantly enjoys sex and thinks that others should have that right too.

In the same way that Hustler magazine has historically relished a sexuality that is (relatively) uninhibited by conventional standards of "good taste," *The People vs. Larry Flynt* is a slick film that caters to the mores of the middle-class half-price Tuesday crowd, portraying the controversy invoked by Hustler magazine as culminating in the courtroom, not in the pages of the magazine itself. In contrast to a magazine that prides itself on its sexualization of aspects of the body conventionally perceived as "vulgar," *The People vs.*

Larry Flynt opts instead for Hollywood glamour, managing to make even a drug-ravaged overweight Larry Flynt seem likable in his own special way.

As the first soft-core porn magazine to depict first limp and then erect penises, gaping orifices and a special body odour scratch n' sniff section belonging to bodies that could be pregnant, middle-aged, amputated and/or transgender, Hustler in actuality was porn that mocked the smooth, impenetrable body that was always envisioned through a soft-focus lens. When compared to its contemporaries, Playboy and Penthouse, Hustler was groundbreaking in that it destroyed taboos suppressing bodies possessing such unappealing attributes as bodily functions and fluids.

In addition, Hustler provoked reader outrage when it portrayed an interracial pictorial in 1975, which according to Hustler, enraged both the KKK and the NAACP. Hustler's column, "Hot Letters," offers a voice to even the most sexually depraved loser who still lives with his parents, allowing readers to write in about their fantasies and 'sexperiences'.

However, whether or not the inclusivity of race and class in Hustler can be regarded as a form of emancipation is questionable. This 'inclusivity' of race in Hustler often infers the exotic depiction of Amazonian-like black

women with 'inhuman' sexual appetites and organs, accompanied by articles such as "Why Black Juries Set Brothers Free" (on the stands now).

While in *The People vs. Larry Flynt* it is fun to watch anti-porn activists making fools of themselves as they clamour to read and stare at the abhorrent magazine that is at once immoral and attractive, it is not true that the only people that find Hustler problematic are the tight-assed members of the morality squad who drink milk and are in bed by 9 PM every night. For the most part, it is Hustler's cartoons that have been the source of much public adversity since its launching, not the 'honesty' or explicitness of the pictorial spreads.

When asked his response to recent complaints about a Hustler cartoon that depicts lynched black men as playthings for KKK members, Flynt answered that, "Not everyone understands that humour comes from misery and misfortune... Take a stereotypical situation, exaggerate it to a point that it becomes ridiculous, and it becomes funny". We can safely assume that this would also be Flynt's response to a recent cartoon picturing a fat, drunk man with a baseball bat behind his back standing outside of a women's shelter, entreat-

Fuck No Monkey, Suck No Monkey

Bad news, cocksuckers. Scientists studying HIV's simian counterpart, SIV, have discovered that so-called Monkey AIDS is 6,000 times more likely to be transmitted through oral sex than anal intercourse. Some researchers conclude that taking a dick in the ass may be safer than accepting a drunken bimbo's blowjob—but only if she's had a lot of sex with simians. Sluts, skanks and floozies of the world, keep it clean: Don't fuck an ape. Save your monkey business for us hairy beasts with opposable thumbs.

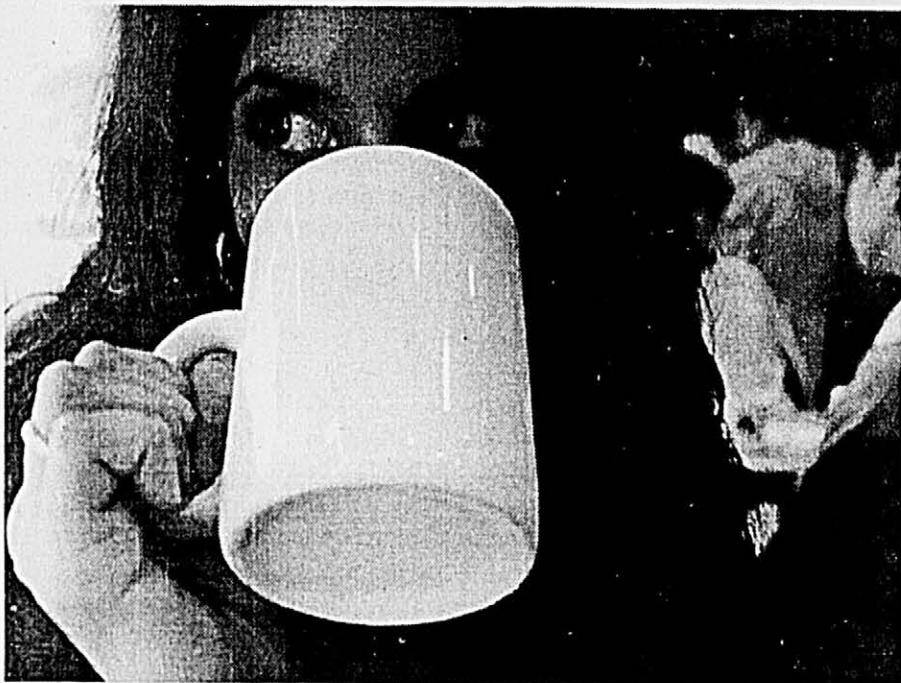


VOLUME 31 - HUSTLER'S VERSION OF SATIRE

ing, "Come on out, honey, I promise never to do it again."

Although Larry Flynt may not have founded Hustler without any ideological basis other than making money, the magazine itself still upholds a politic that has been consistently racist, anti-Semitic and homophobic. If Hustler, as a pornographic and satirical magazine, simply wants to offend anyone, to question anything considered by anybody to be sacred, regardless of gender, race or ethnicity, you have to wonder why its imagery seems to chose its subjects in such a well-developed and systematic formula. In other words, it is all very well to proclaim that no subject is safe from the force of a dissenting voice but the maintaining of institutionalized discrimination is a less lofty ideal. Notions of non-conformity and arguments about free expression in relation to Hustler begin to feel a bit stale after a while. Hustler may see its 'freer expression' of sex as revolutionary, but its politics are far from anarchical.

Percolating profit



The invasion of the coffeebar

by Sarah Johnson

Coffee, coffee everywhere

Recently, I noticed that my parents, who had previously never thought of coffee beyond a big metal can of Maxwell House, were now keeping pricey bags of coffee beans in the refrigerator — the ones they'd have to grind themselves. Hours after that discovery, my mom asked if I wanted to go and "get coffee." Oddly, we ended up going to the same coffeehouse that I had visited only the night before with my friends.

What had happened to the coffeehouse culture once synonymous with beatniks, black turtle-necks, pretentious poetry and folk music? While small, independent coffeehouses that host poetry and hang local artwork on their walls still exist in large numbers, the more ubiquitous coffeehouse symbols today are the large, corporate chains that seem to pop up every other day. The dark, smoky, struggling coffeehouse is now the clean, well-lit, smoke-free, financially stable coffeebar where mothers feel comfortable hanging out. Indeed, where mothers *hang out*.

The coffeehouse has been around in the Middle East and Europe for centuries. They were places where strudel was eaten, revolutions planned and masterworks written. During the 1950s, coffeehouses began emerging in the U.S. Rooted in the bohemian tradition of the cafés of the Left Bank, the American coffeehouse had a reputation for being a haven of subversive thought. Coffee was not the emphasis — it was just something to go with your cigarette and conversation.

The coffeebar, in its present incarnation, is a relatively new phenomenon. The Second Cup, Canada's largest coffeebar chain, only arrived in Montréal three years ago. While the coffeebar may be new to North Americans, the concept of the "third place" is not. Traditionally, people have had a third place that they frequented besides home and work — usually a bar. Now, as the profits of coffee chains can prove, many people would rather partake in a cappuccino than a cocktail.

But is the coffeebar just another trend? Not as far as Starbucks is concerned. Currently the largest coffeebar chain in North America, Starbucks was transformed in the mid-1980s when CEO Howard Schultz went to Italy. Charmed by the coziness of the Italian coffeebar, Schultz decided to recreate that feeling in North America. One of the first steps was to base the store around espresso, a drink with limited exposure in North America, rather than straight coffee. With 1995 sales of \$631 million (U.S.), North Americans seem to have been just as charmed by his interpretation.

By the year 2000, Starbucks plans to have 2,000 locations worldwide. Presently, there are more than 970 Starbucks across North America and Japan. From its Seattle headquarters, Starbucks is planning to expand throughout the Pacific Rim and into Europe. Some financial consultants estimate that the number of coffeebars will quintuple in the next five years.

For some, this is a sure sign that the trend is about to peak. And not surprisingly, as Starbucks becomes more and more of an urban presence, it has begun to experience a backlash. In Minneapolis, one com-

munity successfully organized to keep Starbucks out of their neighborhood, citing the need to protect the local coffeehouse and businesses. While such occurrences

a fireplace. A coffee establishment with corporate backing may. And as much as a chain coffeebar may try to have, a Starbucks logo is still unmistakable.

The atmosphere of a chain coffeebar is not a random scheme. In 1992, Starbucks sued a Vancouver Second Cup over similarities in store design. According to Barry Waite of Strategic Objectives, The Second Cup's public relations firm, the matter was "settled in an out-of-court-agreement, under which the terms of the agreement cannot be discussed."

Despite this court case, The Second Cup and Starbucks remain generous toward each other in the press. When asked, The Second Cup replies that the field is large enough for all coffee competitors. And while Starbucks is the North American leader, The Second Cup remains the leader in Canada.

The Second Cup has over 220 Canadian locations. Starbucks may

Besides its alliance with PepsiCo, Starbucks has also made agreements with Breyers ice cream to develop a Starbucks flavoured ice cream, and with Capitol Records to bring the sounds of Starbucks into

may be rare, Toronto experienced a similar reaction last year when two downtown Toronto coffeebar neighbourhoods heard that Starbucks was planning to move in. Although they were not successful in stopping the Starbucks' openings, their protest sparked a city-wide debate about the meaning of community.

Cloning atmosphere

Although Starbucks tries to customize each of its locations to fit the local culture, the result is still one of homogenization. Where independent coffeebars and houses have historically had the upper hand by providing character and definition to the atmosphere surrounding it, the larger coffee chains are trying to emulate this to the further disadvantage of the smaller competitors. A smaller coffeehouse may not be able to have

Second Cup's franchise system is more appealing than Starbucks centrally operated corporate set-up. The Second Cup has also recently purchased the U.S. coffee chain Gloria Jean's, with over 224 stores in the U.S.

In Montréal, there are only two Starbucks locations: in the Dorval airport and in the Chapter's bookstore on St. Catherine Street (a space that The Second Cup, incidentally, also bid for). Beyond this, there are currently no plans to expand in Montréal. However, this may only be a matter of time — Starbucks is open across British Columbia, Calgary, the greater Toronto area and, since October, Ottawa.

The conditions behind the coffee

Large coffee chains such as Starbucks and The Second Cup have received criticism for the conditions under which their products are produced. The beans for an "ideal flavour and an enticing aroma" come from coffee bean producing countries, namely Guatemala, Kenya, Ethiopia and Indonesia, where labour



have plans for 100 stores in the Toronto area, but The Second Cup already has that number in place. As far as investors are concerned, The

conditions are less than desirable. Monitoring the situations from which each coffee chain receives its beans is a difficult task —

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chains do not contract directly with farms who produce coffee beans. Generally, small farms produce coffee and sell it to someone who mixes the beans from several farms together before sending it to the producers. These beans are further mixed with other producer's beans who then sell it to distributors before the accumulated beans are then sold to exporters. These exporters then sell the beans to the chains.

While the corporate offices of The Second Cup in Toronto express concern over labour practices in coffee exporting countries, no formal code of conduct for their suppliers exists. They are, however, researching possibilities for such a code. In the meantime, a foster parents program has been established: every Second Cup store "adopts" a child from a coffee exporting or developing country, becoming the first major corporate partner for the Foster Parents Plan of Canada. The plan can be seen as an acknowledgment of the problematic relationship between coffee importers and their suppliers, but it may also be seen as merely a band-aid solution.

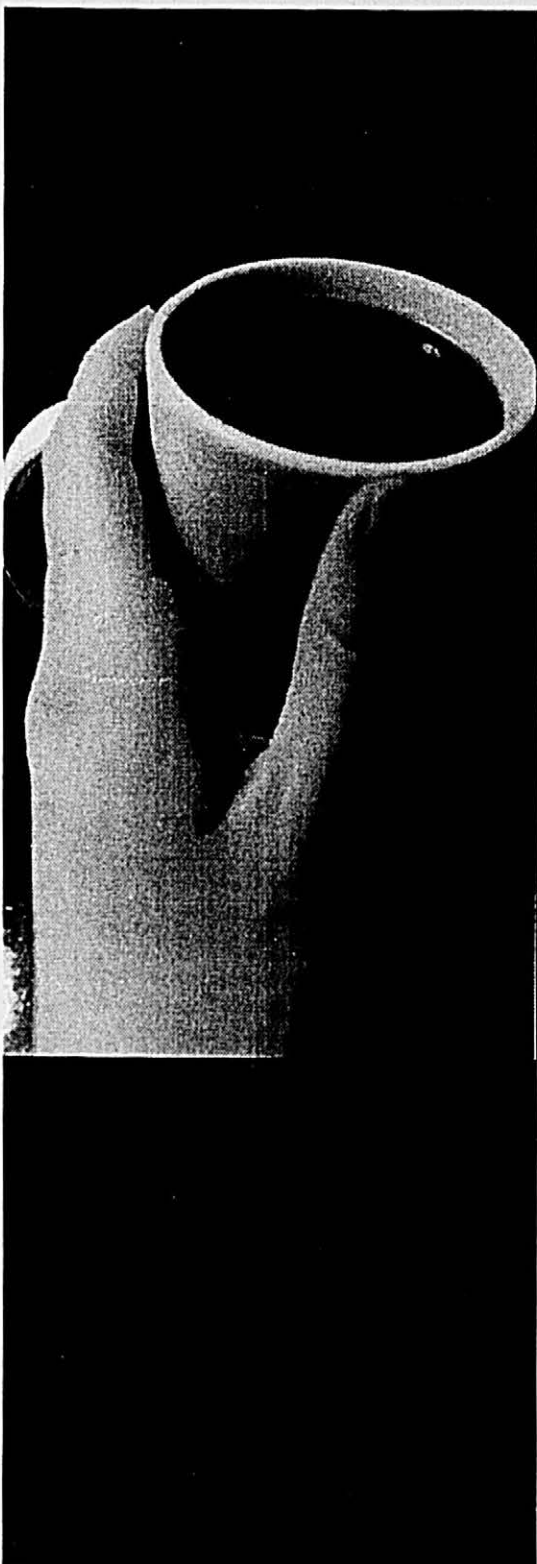
Starbucks is regularly cited for its generous treatment of its workers at home, offering health benefits and stock options to any employee working over 20 hours a week. However, for those who are picking the beans for the well-trained North American *baristas* to make into skinny lattes, the situation is not as pleasant. Under pressure from protesters, Starbucks agreed to draw up a code of conduct which is supposed to be the first step of improving the quality of life in coffee-producing countries. Starbucks is also sponsoring organizations such as CARE and establishing development and education programs in individual coffee exporting countries.

However, Starbucks has also come under fire for its affiliation with PepsiCo. Starbucks and PepsiCo have entered into an agreement to produce a bottled coffee-based soft drink. PepsiCo continues to be the target of international boycotts because of its involvement in Burma, which critics say helps support the military dictatorship in the country.

Besides its alliance with PepsiCo, Starbucks has also made agreements with Breyers ice cream to develop a Starbucks flavoured ice cream, and with Capitol Records to bring the sounds of Starbucks into your own home on an official Starbucks CD.

Quality or quantity?

With such complete infiltration by the chains into the consciousness of coffee drinking and non-coffee



drinking North Americans, where do the independent coffeehouses and bars stand a chance? Many students with hours to spend lingering in coffeebars still swear by the coffee and cigarette combination. However, the large chains generally don't allow smoking at their stores. Starbucks has a smoke-free policy in all of its locations so as not to distract customers from the quality of the bean which they provide. Since The Second Cup on St. Laurent became smoke-free last summer, many students who formerly frequented the establishment are searching out other locations in which to linger. The smoke-free coffeebar has become more of a functional place to swing into for a shot of caffeine, rather than just a place to dwell.

According to one Second Cup employee at the St. Laurent location, "People used to come in, order two coffees and stay all day. Now [our customers] are students coming in to do work, or people

staying just for one coffee. People don't stay as long anymore." And while some people may leave because of the non-smoking rule, she says the same number of people frequent The Second Cup because of it. "I don't personally see a large difference in the number of people here now compared to last year [when smoking was allowed]. But we are interested to find out if there has been a change."

Smaller coffeebars are the ones receiving the smoking crowd — though this alone may not be enough to stay afloat. To keep coffee sales growing, the coffeebar has also had to find a niche. Some have become specialized (such as Internet and pottery cafes), while others have begun to diversify, offering specialty teas or a better selection of food items. While some insiders may be selling their stocks in coffee chains bracing for a change in the trend, the popularity of the coffeebar does not appear to be dimming on the ground level.

Has the independent coffeehouse with its mismatched coffee mugs and idiosyncratic charm been replaced by the organized coffeebar with its highly-trained staff and perfect cappuccinos? The entire concept of the coffeehouse has been redefined in North American terms — while emphasis is on a quality product, it is also on quantity and profit. As we become addicted to caffeine by the masses, the coffeebar will become just another stop in our daily routine. Go into the coffeebar, get your coffee, go on with your day. The cozy coffeebar where one is encouraged to whittle the day away was the original inspiration for our latest "third place". But as more and more coffeebars show up everywhere, will they just assume the coziness of another neighbourhood institution, McDonald's?

As far away from their roots as they have gone, Starbucks and other chains would like nothing more than to be that necessary stop in our daily routines. And while they insist that the market is big enough for everyone, there may not be a place for an independent coffeehouse when a chain coffeebar sprouts up on every corner. As the second most traded commodity after oil, coffee is a product we obviously depend on. We may be becoming a nation who satisfies this need with corporate chain espresso, but at least, as the Dairy Council has noted, people are drinking more milk. Even if it is foamed.

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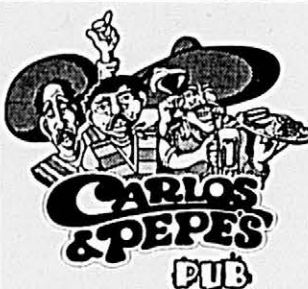
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